Minister in Hiding After Giving Police Evidence of RFK Plot

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By WILLIAM DICK

A California clergyman is in hiding after telling police he can prove more than one person was involved in the murder of Senator Robert Kennedy.

One attempt already has been made on the life of the Reverend Jerry Owens and he has received two telephoned warnings to keep quite or he and his family will suffer the consequences.

The Rev. Owens, a Baptist evangelist, said accused assassin Sirhan B. Sirhan had at least three associates, one of them a girl, and he can identify all of them.

The minister said he met Sirhan and his confederates before the assassination and was almost duped into an unwitting role in the conspiracy himself — as driver of the getaway car after the murder.

Rev. Owens is now hiding out on the outskirts of San Francisco at a location known only to a handful of Los Angeles authorities and his attorney, celebrated criminal lawyer George T. Davis.

"My client has told his story in full to the Los Angeles police but so far they have not extended their investigation and they never asked him to appear before the grand jury," Davis told the ENQUIRER last month.

"Meantime, Owens' life and the lives of his family are in jeopardy from the plotters who want his lips sealed."

Since going into hiding, the Rev. Owens has been questioned by Los Angeles Deputy District Attorney David Fitts, Police Lt. Manny Pena and Sgt. Enrique Hernandez. The sergeant is in charge of the department's lie-detection equipment.

But there has been no comment from Los Angeles police although Chief Deputy District Attorney Lynn D. Compton, who will prosecute Sirhan's case, confirmed: "We have recorded his (the minister's) story."

Davis, who said he believes the minister's account in

its entirety, was critical of the police attitude.

"But I'm not surprised for it seems that the police prefer that no matter what you know is going to happen or might happen, you do nothing until it does happen," he said.

"Instead, you spent time trying to close the barn doors."

"But I still say that my client could be an important witness in the Robert Kennedy assassination and in proving that his murder was linked with those of President Kennedy and Martin Luther King."

The Rev. Owens' story, as related by Davis, was this:

One June 3, the minister picked up two hitchhikers in his car in Los Angeles. After the June 5 assassination of Kennedy, the minister saw a picture of one of the two men on television.

It was Sirhan, the accused assassin.

The minister said that Sirhan, which riding beside him, commented on the car's hood ornament, a silver horse.

"Sirhan told me he was interested in horses because he had been a racetrack exercise boy and would like to have a horse himself," Davis quoted the minister as saying.

"I am a horseman myself and I told Sirhan that I had a palomino I would sell him for $300. We arranged a meeting for 11 o'clock that night and I gave Sirhan my card with my telephone number on it."

The minister said when Sirhan showed up that night he was accompanied by the other hitchhiker, another man and a girl. He said Sirhan told him then the money would be ready at 8 a.m. the next day — the morning before the Kennedy murder.

Sirhan and one of the men appeared that morning as scheduled but Sirhan reported the money would not be available until that night at 11 o'clock.

Then Sirhan asked the minister to give him and his companion a ride to the Ambassador Hotel where they got off at the kitchen entrance, Sirhan explaining he planned to get the money from a friend on the kitchen staff.

"Sirhan asked the Rev. Owens to meet him at that same entrance at 11 o'clock that night to pick up the money," Davis said.

It was in a kitchen passageway of the Ambassador Hotel that Kennedy was fatally shot at 12:30 a.m. on June 5—precisely 1½ hours after the scheduled appointment.

"Something interfered with my own schedule so that I was unable to keep the 11 o'clock appointment," the minister told Davis.

"It is just as well that I did for it is perfectly plain to me now that the conspirators intended to use me in their escape plan following the killing.

"In fact, I believe the assassination may have been scheduled originally for 11 p.m., possibly in some other area of the hotel, after which the conspirators would leave in my car.

"But when I did not show up at 11 p.m., the conspirators probably were thrown into some confusion. They were forced to revise their plan with the result that the assassination was put off for an hour and a half."

When the Rev. Owens switched on his television later

that morning, he was shocked to hear about the assassination.

His shock later turned to horror when the picture of Sirhan as the accused assassin was flashed on the television screen.

The minister lost no time in going to police headquarters and telling his story, in which, however, the police officers seemed to show a scant amount of interest.

Davis said that very night the minister got an anonymous telephone call from a man who said:

"Keep your - - - - mouth shut if you know what's good for you and your family."

"The call had to come from one of the people the Rev. Owens had been negotiating with because only they had his number, which was on the business card he said he gave Sirhan," Davis said.

"He had an unlisted telephone number."

A second telephoned threat was received by the minister two days later, Davis said.

Then, on July 1, came the attempt on the minister's life, Davis said.

The Rev. Owens, accompanied by a bodyguard supplied by Davis after the telephoned threats, was driving his car near San Francisco when another automobile sped up alongside and tried to force the minister off the road. Only by skillful maneuvering of his car did the minister escape a possibly fatal accident.

Davis has suggested the minister go before the grand jury.

However, Chief Deputy District Attorney Compton told J. Robert Smith of the Pasadena Independent Star-News: "There would be no legal or practical value in having this man repeat his story before the grand jury."

Davis achieved national prominence as defense attorney for Caryl Chessman several years ago.

More recently, Davis defended Jack Kirschke, the former Los Angeles deputy district attorney who was accused of murdering his wife and her lover.

In Davis' view, the Los Angeles police are too anxious to wind up the case in a simple fashion—with just one defendant on whom they can concentrate their investigation.

"The police should have showed an immediate interest in the Owens story because of what he said about the appointment he had with these people at the Ambassador's kitchen entrance," he said.

"This was right outside where Kennedy was shot and that should have made the police wonder why they wanted Owens there.

"Personally," Davis said, "I believe everything Owens has said about the attempt to use him as the getaway driver.

"But to look into a possible conspiracy means a lot of extra work. It is so much easier to lay everything on one person rather than to consider him as a possible patsy.

"What I am saying, in other words, is that Sirhan could be a patsy in this case."

Davis said he is becoming increasingly convinced that a link exists in the killings of President Kennedy, Senator Kennedy and Martin Luther King.

"Every one of these has been blamed on a single in-

dividual in almost an identical pattern.

"But I don't think it makes any sense to ignore the possibility of a conspiracy," he said.

"I still say my client may be a very important witness in proving that all three killings are linked. And as an attorney who has handled many important criminal cases over the past 37 years I am not going to put my reputation on the line for something I don't really believe," Davis told this reporter.

Meanwhile, the threats to the minister coming from some person or group that wants him to keep quiet are very real.

That is why the minister has been provided protection and is in hiding, Davis said.

"He is a sensitive target for somebody even though the Los Angeles police are not giving him any attention," he said.